

## **EFL READING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: LITERARY VERSUS GENERAL TEXTS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Ensuring the profound value of reading to foreign language acquisition within higher education programs, the current paper delineates a research study on reading within EFL contexts. The study was conducted for almost one academic semester at the institution where the researcher works. The impact of reading literary versus general texts on enhancing EFL university students' performance in the reading skill was explored involving two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group students were exposed to literary texts whilst the control group students were exposed to general texts. To measure effectiveness of experimental treatment, the researcher administered a pre-posttest using paired samples t-test. Based on the statistical findings, the experimental group students' performance on the communicative reading competency pre-posttest was significantly better than their counterparts of the control group. In light of the study findings, a number of implications and recommendations have been proposed for EFL researchers and specialists to take into consideration.*

**KEYWORDS:** Communicative Reading Competency, English as a Foreign Language, General Texts, Literary Texts

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Characterized by the expansion of knowledge and technological revolution, the current era necessitates the enhancement of a formula capable of keeping pace with recent developments, in order to ultimately direct them towards distinction for all. Successful university education in today's world therefore involves much more than enabling students to master basic knowledge. What is it that would contribute significantly to quality university education in today's demanding world? Obviously, a variety of factors are involved amongst the most prominent of which, the author thinks, is enabling students to acquire English as a lingua franca. An English as a foreign language (EFL) university faculty for a number of years, the author feels confident to state that in terms of foreign language acquisition, it is but reading for information and pleasure that would not only augment language skills and elements, but it would also yield in a generation of thinkers who can adopt and adapt, respond and react, analyze and initiate, rather than receive and forget.

How can EFL instructors equip university students with sufficient communicative reading competency? Logically speaking, the answer has to touch upon different aspects. For the purpose of the current study, however, the answer is excluded to text type. The more students are exposed to language manipulated skillfully in reading passages, the more likely they will be able to read effectively. Utilizing literary texts, therefore, would be beneficial in terms of enabling students to read effectively due to the impressive, powerful use of language amongst other factors. This conviction goes in harmony with some researchers' suggestions for utilizing literature to promote foreign/second language skills, reading in particular (see for example Al Alami, 2016b; Booth, 1998; De Carlo, 1999; De Naples, 2002; Hock, 1999; McRae, 2008).

According to the aforementioned researchers, using literary texts can be seen as a means of markedly improving students' proficiency in reading skills. Although processing literary texts might be demanding, it is worth the effort as a rich source of relevant language data from which one can acquire language (Bagherkazemi & Alemi, 2010). Further, a growing interest in affect in foreign language acquisition proposes that, pleasure and involvement of the type that literary reading creates can significantly contribute to language acquisition.

With the profound value of reading literary texts to foreign language acquisition in mind, the current paper portrays a research study on reading within EFL contexts. The impact of reading general texts versus reading literary texts (namely novellas and short stories) on EFL university students' performance in the reading skill was examined, involving an experimental and a control groups. A literary text, it be a novel/novella/short story/poem/play, is different from a general text in that it is mainly characterized by having literary devices skillfully employed to create a certain effect on the reader. Literary devices may range from simple ones such as similes to complex ones such as symbolism. A general text, on the other hand, is a non-literary text the thematic issues of which are usually simple to identify and grasp.

Section 2 highlights study purpose and rationale. Next, section 3 is a literature review of some related areas. Section 4 delineates study implementation and section 5 proceeds to discuss study findings, presenting a number of implications and recommendations for EFL specialists to take into consideration. The paper concludes with final remarks stated in section 6, followed by an appendix exemplifying a number of related issues.

### **Study Purpose and Rationale**

The English language has been playing an increasingly remarkable role in a world where many countries have become a small town, communicating through one common language. Accordingly, focus should be made on common practices that would be of use and interest to the EFL world in terms of upgrading English language educational outcomes. As mentioned above, the current study was conducted in a country within the EFL world, namely, the United Arab Emirates where English proficiency is a university requirement as the medium of instruction at both public and private universities is English for the majority of university study programs.

Current teaching methodologies of English as a foreign language are based upon the communicative approach which aims to equip students with adequate communicative competence, so that in the long run they will be able to employ English language skills for genuine communication purposes. Since reading is an integral part of the human communication process, it is an integral component of EFL university programs in the United Arab Emirates. It seems reasonable then to assume that all EFL university students are well-equipped to handle reading tasks in English, demonstrating through such activities an adequate repertoire of reading skills. Personal experience and the author's colleagues' observations, however, reveal that this does not apply to all EFL university students, which in turn may not qualify them to fully exploit the foreign language of English as required by their curricula (Al Alami, 2016a). Excluding English linguistics; literature and translation majors, the English language courses offered to EFL university students as a university requirement are General courses and in some cases English for specific purposes (ESP) courses are also offered, with little reference to literary texts.

This paper argues that utilizing literature in the EFL university classroom would be beneficial in terms of enhancing students' reading skills. This claim has also been put forward by a number of researchers who advocate the idea of including literary texts into the second/foreign language curriculum to upgrade learners' language skills in general and reading skills in particular (Carroli, 2008; Cook, 1994; Divsar & Tahriri, 2009; Erkaya, 2005; Ghosn, 2002; Hanauer, 2001; Koosha & Jalilnejad, 2015; Shanahan, 1997; Van, 2009). Additionally, some researchers such as Bobkina (2014) and Lazar (1993) claim that literary texts enhance cognitive and language skills, and enrich understanding of the human nature. Mention of the aforementioned researchers should not be made without mention of Tso Wing-Bo (2014: 115) who believes that even though teaching literature in EFL contexts may be more demanding than teaching the 'straightforward and conventional mechanics of English language', it still can be seen as a useful resource for learning language as well as for enriching students' critical and cultural literacies.

Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate the impact of using literary versus general texts on EFL university students' performance in reading skills. Seeking to achieve the intended aims of this study, the following primary research question below was addressed.

Does utilizing a literary text have a significant impact on enhancing EFL undergraduate students' reading skills?

Based on the primary research question above, the secondary research question below was formulated.

What differences are there between the experimental and control groups' performance on the communicative reading competency pre-posttest?

Moreover, the following null hypothesis was formed in accordance with the secondary research question above: There is no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups' performance on the communicative reading competency pre-posttest.

### **Reading within EFL Contexts: Potpourri of Ideas and Suggestions**

Section 3 is a literature review of reading within EFL contexts. The main aim of including this section is to highlight a number of ideas and suggestions regarding EFL reading for enlightenment and enrichment purposes. To start with, reading is a developmental, interactive, and global process. The process of reading incorporates linguistic knowledge, topic knowledge, and vocabulary knowledge amongst other sorts of knowledge. What are some of the major points which EFL instructors should consider to ensure successful reading outcomes? Considered from Greig's point of view (2015), reading tasks in the EFL classroom should ultimately enable students to read authentic materials. Accordingly, instructors need to ensure that both the task and the materials are as authentic as possible, whilst pursuing the reading skills students should develop.

The use of reading journals, Aliponga (2013) states, provides a means for students to actively engage in second/foreign language texts and reflect on them. Students should be encouraged to move beyond the simple decoding of words to create meaning and enter into an interactive dialogue with the text. A suggested form for a reading journal consists of three stages: expectations prior to reading, reactions during reading, and thoughts after reading the text.

Carter (2010) stresses the effectiveness of transformative text analysis. Based on a methodology of active reading, transformative analysis is derived from the assumption that close reading may result in a more passive reception of the text. Instead, putting the reader into a more active role by forcing the text into a different generic or linguistic design, will lead to a more active engagement with the text. If textual organization and language features are drawn to readers' attention, noticing is more likely to take place. The process here requires that readers compare an original text with one that has been rewritten, transformed and reregistered.

Should EFL learners be encouraged to read extensively? According to Hattle (2010), learners who read extensively increase their vocabulary and gain intrinsic understanding of grammatical structures. They also have the advantage of becoming autonomous learners. Opening a new world of culture, learners enjoy extensive reading as a useful habit. Three ideas for encouraging EFL learners to read extensively are: help learners set off on the right foot, foster learners' success, and exploit the learning context. Clarity (2007) also advocates adopting an extensive reading program. According to Clarity, extensive reading is reading a number of texts over a sustained period; reading for pleasure at a comfortable level for the student with the main goal being that of creating fluency as well as arousing motivation. A proposed implementation plan includes six steps: orientation to extensive reading, finding student level, teacher/student/text interaction, reading in class, presenting purposeful reading tasks, and offering adequate support.

Gajdusek (2009) describes two paradigms of reading: the receptive and the interactive paradigms. The receptive paradigm comprises of three areas: a text containing meaning, a reader seeking meaning, and the meaning as resided in the text. Similarly, the interactive paradigm comprises of the components of text, reader, and meaning. However, the approach is totally different in that a reader is expected to have purpose, expectations, as well as experience and knowledge to handle a text. The text is seen as a graphic representation of a meaning, which is the result of active interaction between a text and a reader, hence becoming part of the reader's knowledge. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2005), amongst other scholars, emphasize the importance of teaching the following reading skills: previewing and making predictions, scanning, making inferences, building vocabulary, understanding paragraphs, finding patterns of organization, skimming, and summarizing.

Some specialists discuss the role of genre approaches in relation to reading (Hicks, 1997; Hyon, 1996; Muncie, 2002). Muncie (2002), for instance, explains that genre approaches focus on the reader and the conventions that a piece of writing needs to follow, to be successfully accepted by its readership. Generally speaking, the philosophy of genre approaches is that all texts conform to certain conventions. If students are to be successful in joining a particular English language discourse community, they will need to be able to produce texts which fulfill the expectations of the readers in terms of content, grammar, and organization.

With the advent of creative reading approach and the heightened importance of reader-response theory, Carter and McCarthy (1994) and Carter and McRae (1999) highlight two principles: process and activity. According to the process-based principle, the reader is involved in reading a text as a process. It is argued that the reader is more likely to appreciate the text as he/she is experiencing it as a process. The activity-based principle, on the other hand, signifies the reader's active role in approaching the text.

In a nutshell, reading in a foreign language is a demanding process whereby a variety of factors are involved. Amongst the most effective contributing factors, the author believes, is the quality

of instruction a teaching practitioner exhibits whilst teaching. For the instruction of reading to be performed efficiently, instructors should be aware of students' academic needs, background knowledge, and language proficiency. Moreover, EFL instructors should ensure provision of appropriate reading input, inclusion of authentic texts, and presentation of inspiring tasks amongst other points.

### **Study Design and Implementation**

The study population is EFL undergraduates specializing in subjects other than English linguistics, literature and translation apart from which country and university they belong to. The study sample included a number of EFL university students studying at a private university in Dubai where the researcher works. The current study can be seen as an experimental research design, involving two groups: experimental and control. Using a control group in a study for comparison purposes would be useful; it would ensure the internal validity of the research and allow the researcher to interpret research findings confidently. To ensure reliable results, the control group students have to be the same as the experimental group except that they do not receive the experimental treatment (Dornyei, 2007).

The two sections that were taught the *Communication Skills* course during the course of research implementation at the institution where the researcher works were chosen as the experimental and control groups. The researcher assigned the section she taught as the experimental group and the section her colleague taught as the control group. The sampling strategy employed for the purpose of this study cannot be claimed to be either purposive or random, but rather a combined strategy. Whoever registered for the section the researcher taught was informed of the study, and upon approval, became a member of the experimental group, and whoever registered for the section the researcher's colleague taught was considered a member of the control group.

With research ethics in mind, the following steps were taken to address ethical issues:

- Prior to implementing the study, the students were exposed to a detailed orientation during which the researcher explained the study's aims and procedures.
- In case a student was reluctant to join the study, the researcher offered him/her two options: to withdraw from the course whilst at the same time retaining the right to claim the money paid for the course Communication Skills as a student fee deposit, or to join the section the researcher's colleague was to teach (the control group).
- Participants were offered the opportunity to remain anonymous.
- Rights of participants were protected.
- All information was treated with the strictest confidentiality.

The experimental group included seventeen students: eleven males and six females belonging to the colleges of Business, Engineering, and Interior Design. The control group, on the other hand, was comprised of twenty-three students: fourteen males and nine females belonging to the same colleges of Business, Engineering, and Interior Design. It is worth mentioning that the control group students who wrote the pre-test were twenty-three. However, six of them did not write the post-test which was due to the fact that some withdrew from the course later, while others were absent on the day the post-test was administered. Both groups were taught



the Communication Skills course for one academic semester, that is, fifteen weeks. The first and fifteenth weeks of the semester however can be excluded because they can be seen as introduction to and conclusion of the semester. Upon the completion of the academic semester, both groups were expected to: read for information and read for pleasure purposes, responding aesthetically to a variety of texts.

The experimental group students were taught by the researcher, using one English novella and six short stories. The seven literary texts were chosen to illustrate a variety of characters; settings; styles and plots, as well as to provoke reflection on different issues. Factors such as “age group, length, language complexity, variety, cultural appropriateness, authenticity, values/moral, and relative contemporary” are to be considered throughout the selection process of literary texts for EFL teaching purposes (Al Alami, 2016a:150). For details on selection criteria of literary texts, see also Brumfit 1981, Buckton 1983, Christopher 1995, and Taberski 1987.

Whilst reading literary texts in class, experimental group students were requested to identify texts’ characters, themes, plots, conflicts, and genres. Additionally, they were expected to recognize: connotations and denotations, variation in vocabulary use according to author’s purpose, and use of irony; symbolism and cohesive devices employed in literary texts. To achieve the intended aims, experimental group students were provided with stimulating and structured opportunities to use English with increasing precision in contexts appropriate to their needs. Provision of such opportunities entailed that study subjects were involved in various thinking, feeling, and communicating activities. With quality education in mind, the author adopted the sequential procedure below (see also Al Alami, 2013).

*Setting the scene:* The first stage aimed at introducing the text to be read whilst arousing subjects’ motivation by means of purposeful activities such as brainstorming and ice-breaker.

*Reading in progress:* The second stage aimed at augmenting subjects’ reading skills in English. This stage included the following sub-stages:

- Speed reading for literal comprehension.
- Focused reading for detailed comprehension.
- Word finder for acquisition of vocabulary.
- Close study for comprehension of literary text elements such as character, plot, setting, style, theme, and narrator.
- Readers’ responses for judgment making.
- Follow up for further skill practices.

*Language highlights:* The third stage aimed at expanding subjects’ knowledge of grammatical structures and literature elements, including the following sub-stages: *structure discussion* (grammar and structure in context), and *literary discussion* (literary devices in context).

*Portfolio work (text reproduction):* The final stage aimed at offering further practice in the skills of reading and writing through rewriting the text whilst making some changes such as narrating the story from a different point of view, changing the ending, and so on.

Throughout study implementation, the researcher employed various approaches: stylistic, semantic, dialectical, and literary criticism. Moreover, the researcher introduced a new approach, communicative reading competency, in an attempt to augment subjects’ reading

skills whilst at the same time promoting their communication competencies in English. According to the author, reading is a communicative act entailing active interaction with ideas, facts, suggestions, opinions, feelings and attitudes stated explicitly and implicitly in man's *articulated input* by means of written symbols. Communicative reading competency can be defined as acquiring adequate repertoire of reading abilities which would enable students not only to perform reading tasks skillfully, but also to manipulate language in stretches of spoken and written discourse, for a wide range of purposes. Communicative reading competency manifests itself in realization of aims such as skillful performance of reading tasks, whether as simple as scanning or as advanced as reading between and behind the lines could be. Logically speaking, therefore, communicative reading competency paves the way for attainment of communication targets amongst other gains.

According to the communicative reading competency approach, the following analyses are to be conducted whilst discussing literary texts in class: conceptual analysis (analyzing major elements of a literary text), comparative analysis (finding similarities in texts belonging to the same genre/theme/era), contrastive analysis (identifying differences amongst texts in terms of main elements such as genre, style, and theme), and critical analysis (making judgments based upon personal viewpoints and experiences). Furthermore, the process of dealing with a literary text should adopt a *STIREC* sequential approach to reading. The *STIREC* sequential approach to reading literary texts has been proposed by the author of this paper, including the following steps:

- Skimming: Gaining an overall idea of the literary text.
- Tracking: Locating information which requires detailed understanding of the literary text.
- Interpreting: Identifying the theme of the literary text as well as the writer's purpose and attitude.
- Relating: Relating main points pinpointed in a literary text to life experiences.
- Evaluating: Valuing the worth of a literary text as a dignified experience.
- Creating: Writing a different ending to the text, rewriting the text from a different point of view, and so on.

Turning the discussion to the control group, the students were taught by the researcher's colleague using general English texts such as making contacts and getting the right job (see Brook-Hart, 2013). It is worth mentioning that excluding the text type, course instructor, and some teaching methodologies, all the other factors were the same; namely, assessment tool (pre-posttest), reading skills, lecture timing; length and venue, as well as students' genders; backgrounds and university majors. As mentioned above, the control group was taught by the researcher's colleague who can be considered a well-qualified professional. It is very unlikely therefore that the control group's performance would have improved significantly had the researcher taught them instead of her colleague. Commenting on the teaching methodologies employed whilst teaching the control group, the researcher's colleague's reading lectures reflect a typical university reading class where instructors usually start with background knowledge, followed by skimming and scanning activities, and concluded with detailed comprehension activities.

As far as study variables are concerned, there were two variables: independent and dependent. The independent variable was the proposed treatment; namely, using English literary rather than general texts for teaching Communication Skills as a university requirement course to augment EFL communicative reading competency on the part of students. The dependent variable was students' achievement on the communicative reading competency pre-posttest. To measure the effectiveness of the proposed treatment, the study tool was a pre-posttest involving the experimental and control groups. A communicative reading competency pre-post test was administered at the outset and towards the end of the academic semester. To ensure standardization of language assessment, the test was based on an internationally recognized examination (Mahnke & Duffy, 2010), aiming to measure students' communicative reading competency in English. The test consisted of six passages, all of which were followed by multiple choice questions. The six passages measured the following reading skills: comprehending the gist of a reading text, differentiating between facts and opinions, deducing meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary from context, grasping opinions and attitudes implied, and making judgments based upon personal knowledge and experience. All the questions were multiple choices where no writing was required, hence maximizing objective assessment.

Aiming to describe the statistical findings transparently, this section proceeds to present the statistical treatment conducted for the purpose of the current study. As mentioned earlier, the first study hypothesis states that there is no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups' performance on the communicative reading competency pre-posttest. To examine the study hypothesis, a *paired samples t-test* was conducted to gather sufficient statistical data. Tables 1 and 2 below reveal the statistical results.

**Table 1: Experimental group's communicative reading competency pre-post test**

**Paired samples statistics**

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	14.0000	17	4.86056	1.17886
Posttest	18.0000	17	2.85044	.69133

**Paired samples correlation**

Test	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pre-test & post-test	17	.645	.005



**Paired samples test**

Test	Paired Differences					T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-test Post-test	-4.00000	3.72492	.90342	-5.91518	-2.08482	-4.428	16	.000

**Paired samples statistics**

Test	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	13.4118	17	4.75735	1.15383
Post-test	15.4706	17	7.30683	1.77217

**Table 2: Control group's communicative reading competency pre-post test****Paired samples correlations**

Test	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pre-test & Post-test	17	-.128	.624

**Paired samples test**

Test	Paired Differences					T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-test Post-test	-2.05882	9.21595	2.23520	-6.79723	2.67958	-.921	16	.371

Based on the statistical results, both groups could achieve progress towards the end of the academic semester, as indicated by the statistical tests above. However, the experimental group students could achieve a significant progress. As the *p-value* for the experimental group (*Sig.*=.000) is less than 0.05, while the *p-value* for the control group (*Sig.*=0.371) is greater than 0.05, it is evident that there is a significant difference between the performance of the two groups on the communicative reading competency pre-posttest in favor of the experimental group.

### Discussion of Study Findings, Implications and Recommendations

Seeking to offer a valid answer to the primary research question ‘Does utilizing literary texts have a significant impact on enhancing EFL undergraduate students’ reading skills?’, it can be claimed that utilizing literary texts has a significant impact on promoting EFL undergraduate students’ reading skills, as proved by the statistical tests conducted for the current study’s purpose. Relying on the current study’s findings, section 5 presents a number of implications and recommendations for researchers and specialists within the EFL world to take into account.

Firstly, utilizing literary texts in the contexts of EFL has proved to be effective in terms of learning outcomes such as developing reading skills and augmenting communication competencies on the part of undergraduate students. A literary text can be wonderfully versatile. Through using a novella, for instance, we can launch reader learners on a voyage of discovery, exploring ways other than ours of viewing things. Viewed from a linguistic perspective, literature can empower learners to master reading skills. Culturally, literary pieces allow for exposure to the target culture, making it possible for reader learners to examine universal human experiences within the context of a particular setting. Aesthetically, literary pieces reflect a unique experience, providing perceptive insight into man’s existence within the intellectual bound of a literary framework (Al Alami, 2016a; Lima, 2005; Savvidou, 2004).

Excluding the discussion to enhancement of communicative reading competency within EFL contexts, the second implication emphasizes the contribution literary texts: short stories, novellas and novels in particular, may make in this regard. Whilst reading a short story, for example, students engage in characters’ life, raising inquiries about the worlds writers create. As students read, they get exposed to the foreign language in meaningful contexts which require active interaction with the text, communicating and analyzing. This implication supports the suggestions made by a number of specialists who assert that literary texts can contribute significantly to promoting foreign/second language reading skills (see for example Al Alami, 2016b; Bobkina, 2014; Booth, 1998; Koosha & Jalilnejad, 2015; Reese, 2002).

For EFL students to acquire sufficient communicative reading competency, the third implication stresses teaching practitioners’ role in this regard. Instructors should avoid acting as the ultimate authority in class, imposing *black and white answers* when interpretations could be examined and offered from students’ perspectives. Their role needs to be that of a facilitator rather than that of a dominator (McCarthy, 2015; Zyngier and Fialho, 2010). In terms of selecting appropriate approaches to employ in class, it is the author’s belief that instructors should adopt an eclectic approach in the light of teaching and learning circumstances. Needless to say, each approach has its positive and possibly negative impacts within various settings. It is then the instructor’s insight that would guide her/him towards selecting the most appropriate approaches for different situations (Li, 2012; Mwanza, 2017).

Inspired by the findings of the current study, the author feels the need to make four recommendations. Firstly, EFL practitioners ought to utilize literary texts, short stories; novellas and novels in particular, to augment university students' communication skills in general and communicative reading competency in particular. Secondly, instructors need to acquire a repertoire of methods and approaches, seeking to employ what may work most effectively with a particular type of learners under various circumstances. Thirdly, literary texts should be approached as a resourceful input for EFL students' academic and intellectual growth. Fourthly, it is of extreme importance to emphasize the role exposure and practice can play in terms of improving learners' reading skills. The more EFL university students are exposed to reading input and have purposeful practice, the more effective learning outcomes will be.

## CONCLUSION

In an increasingly complex and demanding world, undergraduates need to embrace the four Cs: communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Reading has a significant role to play in terms of equipping undergraduates with the four Cs required as *prerequisites* for success in today's world. Within EFL contexts in particular, instructors should encourage students to acquire reading as a lifelong habit, for it is through reading that learners can *grow* academically, intellectually, professionally, and emotionally. As highlighted earlier, communicative reading competency is much more than mastery of grammar and vocabulary. It also requires other factors such as acquiring the ability to interpret discourse within its cultural and social contexts. Addressing the question of what texts to read, the author proposes using literary texts such as novellas and short stories. Literature represents various uses of the foreign language both literary and conventional. Literature also offers a great means of communicating the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual concerns of mankind. Literary texts, therefore, should be viewed as an invaluable resource for EFL students' *ever* growth.

To end with, reading is perhaps the most challenging language skill to teach, for it involves many different elements at a time: mechanical eye movement, vocabulary, syntax, spelling, and intellectual comprehension amongst other elements. Yet, it is one of the most purposeful skills to teach. EFL university students may not have to speak much English, but all of them have to read texts in the English language, in order for them to pursue their university studies and be able to *function* effectively in today's demanding world. On a final note, in the midst of a world where tranquility could be a rare coin, perhaps we still can share portrayal of genuine emotion and authentic beauty depicted in man's immortal articulation of thought, sentiment, intellectuality, and creativity: literature!

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## APPENDIX

The appendix includes one of the literary texts used by the author during the experimental treatment implementation. The aim of appendix inclusion is to exemplify some issues related to the proposed treatment.

### **The Pieces of Silver by Karl Sealy**

1. When, at five minutes to ten, the bell started to ring, a pall of silence settled over the noisy playfield.
2. Reluctantly games of cricket and pick-ups were abandoned; climbers came slithering down from the old tamarind tree on the school grounds or dropped quickly from its branches, making haste to clear their mouths of the green, acid fruit they had been enjoying.
3. The school of four hundred odd boys assembled in ranks across the pebbled playfield, waiting for inspection before they could file into the red-walled school. Some glanced apprehensively at their dusty, naked feet, while others tried feverishly to make their nails and hands presentable.
4. The teachers came from the schoolroom in a leisurely bunch, laughing and joking in quiet voices as they sauntered towards the boys.
5. The stout, pompous, acting Headmaster came to the window that opened off his platform on to the playfield, still making an unnecessary clangor with his bell, and looked sternly over the assembled rows of scholars. The smaller boys straightened and stiffened under his cold gaze.
6. As the teachers passed slowly along the ranks the boys turned their hands back and forth and grinned to show their teeth. A number of boys who failed to pass the teachers' inspection of health were hauled out of the ranks and ordered in to the acting Head. There were three strokes with his cane of plaited tamarind stalks for unclean hands; four for improperly brushed teeth and six for an uncombed head.
7. After the inspection the boys filed quietly into school and to their different classes. When you could have heard a pin drop the schoolmaster rapped out the order: 'Shun!' The entire school of boys flung their hands to their foreheads and chanted: 'Good morning to our teachers.'
8. The schoolmaster announced a hymn, and emitting an untrue, faltering note, invited the scholars to take it. The boys rendered a rich improvement of the sound, and when the schoolmaster flung his hand up and stamped his foot they tore full-throated into the hymn.
9. At the conclusion of the hymn the boys sang, 'Amen,' bringing their hands up to their faces in an attitude of prayer: The schoolmaster submitted a long, impromptu supplication, rambling and ill-worded, at the end of which the boys said 'Amen' once more. Again the schoolmaster ordered: 'Shun!' The boys came to attention, and school was ready to begin.
10. But this morning the schoolmaster did not order the school to be seated as was the normal custom after prayers. Instead he fixed the school with his cold eyes and said:
11. 'Those who have brought contributions to Mr. Megahey's purse will give them to their teachers.'

12. Hands delved into pockets, while, in the lower classes, a number of small, moist fists closed still more tightly over the pieces of silver which had been wrapped in paper and pressed carefully into their palms.

13. The teachers drew chairs and stools to their respective desks and sat down. Each produced a foolscap sheet on which were recorded the names of those of his class who had contributed to the purse for the retiring Head, Mr. Megahey.

14. No commendation seemed due to the donor of three pence. A sixpence was held up between the thumb and forefinger of the receiving teacher and displayed before the class, while the name of the boy who had presented it was repeated some half a dozen times. Still more ado was made of the bestowal of a shilling. In addition to being patted on the shoulder and beamed on by his teacher, and basking in the envy of his class, he was sent up to be thanked by the acting Head who shook his hand heartily and showed the gleaming gold of his teeth, and who, with a grave gesture, bestowed upon him the fag-end of a stick of chalk with the injunction that it be not used about the school.

15. The receipt of the contributions was over, and the last boy had returned to his seat. On the platform the acting Head cleared his throat for attention and said:

16. 'Those who have contributed to our retiring Head's purse will now sit. Those who have *not* will remain standing.'

17. When the scuffling tumult of a school of boys taking their seats had subsided, here and there about the schoolroom a scattered few stood with downcast eyes.

18. The acting Head was a squat jug of a man, fierce-eyed and unsmiling. He now sauntered along the edge of his platform and fixed, one after the other, each of the standing boys with a look of complete scorn. Then, mopping his brow, he ordered those who had brought no gifts to come up and mount the platform where the dozen of them were lined up.

19. Taking a stick of chalk he scrawled an X upon the forehead of each boy, to the huge delight of the rest of the school. When he had imprinted this symbol of shame upon the brow of each unhappy child, he turned to the laughing school, and holding his hand up to check the gusts of merriment, said:

20. 'Look! They bear the symbol of ingratitude!'

21. The cruel laughter went up to the rafters. The schoolmaster permitted it free swell for a few moments before raising his hand once more.

22. 'Ingratitude,' he went on, 'ingratitude, more strong than human hand. . . Come, Clement. You're in the fourth. Step forward and let's hear Mark Antony on ingratitude. Come, Clement, let us hear you recite the piece, and well.'

23. Clement stepped forward, shabby and barefoot, and with eyes downcast, began to recite the passage in a choked, monotonous tone. Now and again the schoolmaster threatened him with his rod, exhorting him to speak up. The boy would then raise his voice and quicken his words under the threat of the lash, but soon his voice sank back and the recitation resumed its muttered vein.

24. At last, however, the passage was finished. The acting Headmaster then spent some minutes more making the hapless boys the laughing-stock of their school friends. Only when he thought the school on the verge of becoming unmanageable did he dismiss the tormented boys with the words:

25. 'Now go to your places. But bear in mind, every morning, until you show some appreciation for your resigning Headmaster, you shall come up here and stand in shame before the whole school.'

26. It was dusk, and the Dovecots were taking their one substantial meal of the day.

27. No one could think, looking at their home that three penny pieces, or even halfpennies, were to be had there for the asking.

28. The house was a poor, wretched coop of a room, through the black, water-stained shingles of which you could count a dozen blue glimpses of the sky. The walls of the shack were papered with old newspapers and magazines, discolored with age and stained and spotted from roof to floor, torn in a score of places, to reveal the rotting, worm-eaten boards beneath. The small room was divided by a threadbare cotton screen depicting seagulls soaring up from a sea of faded blue. In the midst of this drab poverty the free, soaring seagulls, and the once gay pictures of the magazine pages were an unkind comment.

29. The Dovecots were a family of four: Dave and his wife Maud, Clement and his older sister Evelina.

30. Clement sat on the sanded floor of the poor sitting-room, his plate of rice between his legs; Evelina lolled over the one battered, depreciated mahogany table, picking at the coarse food with an adolescent discontent; Dave Dovecot, a grizzled, gangling laborer, held his plate in his left hand, while with his right he plied his mouth from a peeling metal spoon; at the propped-open window of the room sat Mrs. Dovecot, a long thread of a woman whose bones want had picked like an eagle. Her plate was resting on her lap, and she scraped and pecked and foraged her food like a scratching hen, while she took stock of the passers-by.

31. When Clement had finished, he took up his empty plate and, getting to his feet, went and stowed it away in the dark box of a kitchen. Returning, he slumped down beside his mother's chair and rested his head against her bony thigh.

32. After a time he said:

33. 'Ma, I could have the three pence I've been asking for Mr. Megahey?'

34. 'Three pence boy? Why in de name of de Lord must poor starving people got to find three pence for Jim Megahey?' Parried Mrs. Dovecot, though she knew well enough.

35. 'I've told you and told you and told you, Ma. He's resigning and we've all got to take three pence to give him,' explained Clement patiently once more.

36. '*Hmn*. Three pence is a lot o' money for us poor folk. *Hmn*. Go ask your father. See what *he says*.' Clement got to his feet reluctantly and moved slowly over to where his father was sitting, for he knew from experience that, in parting with money, his father was a far harder nut to crack than his mother.

37. Dave Dovecot utilized the approach of his son by extending his empty plate. Clement took the plate to the kitchen. Then he turned once more to tackle his father.

38. 'Can I have three pence, Papa?' he shouted in his father's ear, for the old man was pretty nigh stone deaf.

39. 'Eh-eh! What's that about a fence, Clement?'

40. This time Clement put his mouth completely into his father's ear and shouted until his dark face grew darker.

41. 'Eh-eh! Don't shout at me,' was all he got for his pains. 'Don't you deafen me? What's that the young varmint says, Maud?'

42. Mrs. Dovecot came over, and got him to understand after two or three attempts.

43. 'Three pence, Maudie,' he cackled, 'three pence! Did you hear that, Maud? Did you ever hear the like? Three pence! Oh Maudie....' And he broke down once more in helpless laughter. Clement went out and sat under the breadfruit tree that grew before the door, resting his back against the trunk.

44. Evelina came to him there when the dusk was thick and sat beside him.

45. There was a close bond of understanding and companionship between these two. Clement leaned against her so that he could feel the cheering warmth of her arms, warm as the still warm ground beneath him. Biting his nails he told her of his morning's shame.

46. She listened as attentively as a mother, and as she listened, she put her hand around his neck and drew his head gently down upon her young bosom.

47. When he had finished talking she put her lips down to his harsh curls, and thought for a long time. Then she said, with a little sigh:

48. 'I know what we'll do, Clemmie. 'Member how 'fore I was took from school we big girls used to go out singing at Christmas? Well, we'll play waits. Only tonight there'll be only you and me.'

49. Clement raised his head and gazed into her face in the starlight.

50. 'Oh, Eve,' he said, 'but it *ain't* anyways near Christmas.'

51. '*Never you mind,*' she said. 'There's still some who'll give us a penny or two. You wait. I'll get our hats and then we'll be off.'

52. She got to her feet and slipped quickly into the house. She returned in a few moments carrying his cap in her hand, her own hat of straw on her head. She settled his cap, then produced a comb.

53. 'When we come to the shop we'll ask for a piece of bread paper,' she said, 'then you'll play the sax while I sing.'

54. They roamed far that night. Evelina's voice rose clear and true to the accompaniment of the paper and comb, long after the moon came up and laid white hands upon the countryside.

55. At last Evelina said, jingling the coins which they had earned in the pockets of her dress:
56. 'Let's make this our last and call it a day.'
57. The house with which they proposed to round off their tour had a pretentious front of red brick. The greater part of the house was in darkness, but from the street the two children could see a couple sitting in the open veranda.
58. Bravely, Evelina unlatched the street gate and led the way up the steps to the veranda.
59. 'Good night,' she greeted the pair in the shadows. 'We would like to sing for you.'
60. The woman chuckled softly and Evelina could see the white gleam of the man's teeth when he said, 'Sure.'
61. The children rendered their song. When they had finished the man got to his feet and approached them, delving in his pocket.
62. 'Thanks for your singing,' he said kindly. 'It was very nice. May, give us some light for a moment.'
63. The woman got from her chair and, leaning through a window, pressed a light switch.
64. And as the light flooded the veranda little Clement was turned to stone, for the tall, greying man foraging the handful of coins was the retiring Headmaster, Mr. Megahey.
65. Clement's scrambled retreat after Evelina had made her little curtsy was perhaps unnecessary, since Mr. Megahey had his glasses off and he didn't seem to recognize him.
66. Out in the road, Evelina let out the laughter that had been welling inside her.
67. 'Just think how we never thought of where your old Head might've moved to after he left the Schoolmaster's house,' she laughed. But he's giving us our biggest taking for the night, anyway. He's giving us sixpence.
68. They counted their takings in the middle of the white road in the moonlight. When they had finished, Evelina poured the coins back into her pocket and said:
69. 'Now I going tell you how we'll fix that brute, Mr. Chase.'
70. On the following morning the acting Head, Mr. Chase, kept his word. Immediately after prayers the boys who had brought no silver were lined up across the platform. They were but eight of them this morning. Two had somehow managed their three penny pieces, while two or three others had absented themselves. Clement counted the line of boys as he took his place among them.
71. As Mr. Chase eyed their bowed heads in enjoyment, Clement stepped forward, the eight pieces of silver upon his extended palm.
72. 'There are eight,' he told the gaping schoolmaster, 'one for *each* of us.'
73. His voice struck through the silent school, clear and thrilling as a star's light.



## **Glossary**

abandoned: gave up

coop: a cage for small creatures

emitting: sending out

fierce: violent

ingratitude: ungratefulness

inspection: the act of examining

odd: unusual

purse: an amount of money collected for some good purpose

receipt: a written statement that one has received money

retiring: stopping work at one's job

sax: saxophone (a metal musical instrument)

scorn: angry feeling of disrespect

scratching: making a sound or movement

submitted: offered for consideration

## ***1. Setting the scene***

### **Ice breaker**

Imagine you have been asked to pay an amount of money contributing to your retired teacher's gift, but you do not have the amount required. What would you do?

### **Brainstorming**

You are going to read a story entitled *The Pieces of Silver*. Based on the title, what speculations can you make about the content of the story?

## ***2. Reading in progress***

### **Speed reading**

How much money does each student have to contribute to Mr. Megahey's purse?

How many sisters does Clement have?

### **Focused reading**

How could Clement contribute to Mr. Megahey's purse?

### **Word finder**

Find the words/phrases which are similar in meaning to each of the following:

unwillingly ( paragraph 2 )

a written statement that someone has received money ( paragraph 15 )

gave warning ( paragraph 23 )

friendly company ( paragraph 45 )

suggested ( paragraph 57 )

cruel ( paragraph 69 ).

### **Close study: characterization and plot**

Write a character profile of Mr. Chase, describing his physical appearance and personality traits.

There is a double twist in the plot, and the children get double satisfaction. Explain how this double twist works.

### **Readers' responses**

If you were an acting head, would you ask all the school's students to contribute to a retired teacher's purse? Give reasons.

If you were Clement, what would you do to contribute to Mr. Megahey's purse? Justify your answer.

What lesson(s) does the story teach us? Support your answer with reference to the story.

### **Follow up**

Have you ever read other stories written by Sealy? Search the internet to find some of the author's publications.

### **3. Language highlights**

#### **Structure discussion: verb tenses**

Read paragraphs 2, 17, & 26 and underline the verbs used in the past simple, past continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous tenses, explaining why each is used.

#### **Literary discussion**

What literary devices are used in the following sentences?

"Clement leaned against her so that he could feel the cheering warmth of her arms, warm as the still warm ground beneath him."

"His voice struck through the silent school, clear and thrilling as a star's light."

What do you think *bony thigh* symbolizes in the following context?

"Returning, he slumped down beside his mother's chair and rested his head against her bony thigh."

### **4. Portfolio work: text reproduction**

One approach to language exploration involves you in recreating the meaning of a story through a variety of formats. A story reproduction may be as simple as creating new characters, or as elaborate as producing a dramatic version of the story. *Reproduce* the story The Pieces of Silver, making the changes which you feel would ensure an interesting reproduction.